

History of Annisquam
written by
Mrs Annie Griffin Sewall
and read by her
Before the C. O. S. and L. A.,
March 11th 1902. #18

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MARCH 11, 1902.

ANNISQUAM.

A tradition among the people at Annisquam affirms that the name by which their section of the town has always been known is derived from Squam, an Indian word descriptive of the harbor, and Ann, the name of the Cape within whose limits it is situated. The earliest mention is in 1635. It is then spelled Wonasquam and spoken of "as a dangerous place to sail by in stormy weather, by reason of the many rocks and foaming breakers."

The spots selected by most of the early settlers for their homes were chosen with reference to the fitness of the soil for agricultural purposes and such is the rugged and broken character of the territory that even the small number of people that then composed its population covered almost every acre of land that could be easily cultivated. Nearly all of the first settlers had land in several different places. Besides their home lots, those who resided in the Harbor had grants at "Fisherman's Field" and those living on the neck had them on "Planters Neck" and land between Lobster Cove and the sea. Possessing these lots in widely separated places, without, in many instances, any mention of a house, the exact spot on which many settlers located,

can not be ascertained.

Planters Neck, where lots were early laid out, and numbered, was "Annisquam" the spot where tradition has always reported to have been the first to have received permanent occupants.

The whole section of Planter's Neck has very little of cultivable land and therefore presented inducements for settling to no other class than fishermen.

This property in 1656 came into possession of Edward Haraden who from the best information obtainable settled upon it and was the first permanent settler in Annisquam. Before the end of the century, Norwood, Davis, Day, Sargent, Yorke, Lane, Griffin, and others had taken up their residence there.

The "Old Castle", presumably the oldest house now standing in Annisquam was built by Joseph Yorke in 1717, making it nearly two hundred years old. He also built the first wharf with ware houses immediately in front of his dwelling. In these early days all the wharves were built above the bridge and the building and launching of ships and the fishing business carried on there.

In 1726 about forty of the families petitioned the town for liberty to set up a meeting house on some of the unappropriated land. The petition was granted in 1728 and



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the new parish was known as the Third Society. Some disagreement existed among the people with reference as to the best location for their meeting house which by the decision of the majority was finally erected at the head of Lobster Cove. It was struck by lightning in 1755 and it shows how prosperous the people were in the village as they felt able to afford to build a new church. The old one was taken down in 1830 and a new one was built on the same site that year and dedicated in 1831, the one now standing.

The religion of this society was then Orthodox, but during the ministry of Mr. Ezra Lechard, the second pastor of the society, a remarkable incident took place, the conversion of pastor and people to Universalism. The change of sentiment on the pastor's part, occurred in 1811, and such was the unbounded influence of the minister on the people, that when he made known to them publicly the new belief, they nearly all voted to retain his services and his creed.

The generosity of this good man is proverbial. On one occasion his wife missed her bellows and on making enquiries of the family, the minister exclaimed, "Oh, yes wife, I gave them to Widow Werring, for on calling there, I noticed her wood was green, and ours being dry, I thought she needed them more than we did".

Coming home from the Harbor with a new pair of shoes for his wife he met an old woman barefoot. The good man alighted and approached the poor woman and pointing to her bare feet, told her to take the shoes and put them on. Whether he replaced them with another pair for his good wife, we are not told.

In those early days the village school was usually taught by some old dame or spinster who was obliged to earn her living. She would gather the children at her home and thus save the expense of rent and fuel. "Schoolmarm Betty" was an old-time instructor and occupied a cottage near where the Leonard School-house now stands. This lady was a strict disciplinarian, and such was the reverence by which she was held by her pupils that every command was implicitly obeyed. When wearied with her labors on a warm afternoon, she would assume a reclining position in her arm-chair, dispose herself for a nap, close her eyes, hold up her forefinger and assure those young pupils that she should know if they moved or looked from their spelling book, as she had eyes in her forefingers. Such wonderful obedience, she invariably rewarded by allowing them a long recess and for diversion from study she ordered them to pick up apples for her pig, who occupied quarters near the house by the sweet apple tree.

In August, 1775, one of the sloops of war the "Falcon" which had aided the British at Bunker Hill made her appearance in Ipswich Bay, and came nearly to the mouth of 'Squam Harbor. A barge containing about fifty men came from the stranger and attempted to land on Coffin's Beach to get a supply of sheep from the farm of Major Coffin. The major suspecting their intention repaired to the beach with five or six of his own men and from behind the sand hills kept up such a brisk firing upon the barge as led the officers in command to conclude that a whole company of soldiers were lying in ambush. He turned back to the ship without landing.

In the same manner the people began privateering on a small scale using their fishing vessels for that purpose. They took one prize, a brig from Canada bound to Boston with a deck-load of live-stock and coal and iron in the hold. She was taken to Wheeler's Point and there discharged. Before her ballast was all taken out, she hauled off, and fell into the channel, where until a few years ago her hull could yet be seen.

Both at that period and since, the women of Annisquam have ever been up and doing. Loyal to their country and faithful to home duties. A story is told of two sisters, twins, Mary and Martha Babson. These sisters

being soon to be married were desirous of having new silk dresses for the occasion, but their father not being rich, could not, they knew, afford such luxuries. So these girls tried to plan some way by which they might earn for themselves these coveted treasures. The result of their planning was that they took their forks and went to the clam flats, just below their house, where every day at low tide they toiled until they had dug and cleaned enough clams to fill a barrel which they salted, and a sailor, about sailing for some foreign port, offered to take their venture and dispose of them at some foreign market. As good luck would have it, he arrived there when the article was in great demand and getting a good price he soon converted the money into yards of silk, thereby making the girls both pleasant and happy.

Many people in the United States were not in sympathy with the second war with Great Britain. Business in our own and other seaport towns was badly interfered with.

In 1813 armed barges from British men-of-war, that were stationed off and cruising round the Cape, used to come into 'Squam River occasionally and see what shipping they could destroy. During one of these raids, they burned a brig off Wheeler's Point, and a wood-coasting sloop that was in the river. The only other vessel to be seen by them



(all of the others having gone up by Pearce's Island) was a schooner owned by Capt. Lane called the "Federalist" lying at the first wharf beyond the bridge. When they were preparing to set her on fire, the wife of the owner pleaded with the commander not to destroy the vessel, but if he must burn her to take her out in the river so the buildings on the wharf might be saved. As the vessel swung off he saw the name the "Federalist". The commander answered, "I will save the vessel for her name."

This was the last visit armed barges made in this river as the people got together and built a fort on Babson's Point in which were mounted two six-pound cannon. That was considered quite a formidable battery in those days. They served, however, to keep armed boats from coming into the river.

The road from Gloucester to Annisquam in those days was a hard one to travel. One would come down Washington Street turning into the street (opposite the old church that then stood on the "green", going over Fox Hill, where Tanny Younger, the witch, used to live, keeping on that road to the old Riverdale schoolhouse, thence to Pilgrim Hill, which was a hard one to get up, round by Norwood's grist mill, at the head of Goose Cove, up what is now called Bennett street, which comes out by the house of

Mrs. Mary O. Moore. You can see what a hard road it was to get over from Gloucester and the reason people used to come from Boston by water in those days. There was no stage line from here to Gloucester, neither was there any post office, and when the first one was established at the head of the Cove, the mail matter was small and was carried by Mr. E. W. Chard who had started a stage line to Gloucester. He used to say he often carried all letters he had for the mail in the crown of his beaver hat.

Ship-building was an important industry in our village and the men here found plenty of work and many families were induced to move here from other homes. In 1827 and further on, this village was the flourishing part of Gloucester. At the head of Lobster Cove two small pinkeys were built in the front yard where Mr. Partridge now lives. Two more were built at the foot of the street and a larger vessel was built upon the wharf where Mrs. A. M. Lane's barn now stands. In 1831, in the yard of Capt. Oliver Lane's home, was built a ship of 348 tons, called the "Gloucester". Capt. Oliver Lane took command of her and went to New Orleans where he took on board a cargo of cotton for Havre France. Capt. Charles Babson of this city went as a boy on his first voyage to sea. After that trip the vessel passed

into other hands and no more was heard of her for a long time. Some years afterward a 'Squam captain bound to Sidney, Australia, when passing an island, saw a ship on shore, high and dry upon the rocks. When arriving at Sidney he learned it was the "Gloucester".

The old "fish-house", called by many the "old custom-house" was used during the war of 1812 for storing smuggled goods. The vessels would come into Ipswich Bay loaded with valuable cargoes and the wives would give the signal, if everything was allright, and there was no custom-house officer in sight. They would then come in and unload their goods in the old ware-house.

Quarrying of granite was also carried on here for many years; this business brought some families to live here who are among the best of the population. Then the fishing business was in its prime and where the grass now grows on the wharves, busy feet were wont to hurry to and fro rolling up barrels and barrels of mackerel and loading vessels with dry fish etc., for Boston and other markets. At one time in 1831, there was a fleet of 65 vessels, 6 coasters, two small vessels and two or three that went trading "down east".

Even the sand on the beaches was converted into money by enterprising men who shipped it into Boston to be used at the glass manufactories in this and other states.

The change has been gradual from a busy thriving village to such as you see it now. The first cause of the decline was during the money panic of 1837. At that time all those in business here were using considerable money in their enterprises and depended upon the banks for discounting notes etc. President Jackson vetoed the rechartering of the U.S. Bank, and in consequence of that veto, a money panic was caused throughout the country. It deeply affected the business men here and they never recovered, but gradually wound up their affairs here and started business in some other locality.

Now the summer life goes on here, and 'Squam is a veritable summer paradise, a natural sanitarium, where salt breezes, sweeping clear from one bay to the other, carry with them all harmful germs and deadly bacteria, and in whose porous soil lurks neither typhoid nor malaria. Here is every variety of scenery: winding river and sheltered coves with shelving banks green with dense and tangled underbrush and gay with piled up boulders which are marvels of coloring and glow with all the prismatic hues. Cliffs of saamed and shattered granite make a well-defined background for the little village where the homes are set each in its own grassy yard. While over the ridge sweep down and back to the shores of Ipswich Bay the sloping pastures, rough with

out-cropping ledges and massive rocks, verdure springing from every rock and crusted with lichen growth of hundreds of slow moving years.

These uplands are rich in other than natural beauties and possibilities, for here, it is said, is one of the primitive banks of deposit of that wild bucaneer, Robert Kidd, and his roystering crew and that somewhere under this innocent looking turf (so runs the legend) north by west so many paces from a strangely marked rock on the little beach are buried pots of Spanish Doubloons and glittering jewels fit for the ransom of a king. Many have sought, but none have found as yet; the brown earth guards her secret well.

This is a grand camping ground for artists and they are well nigh omnipresent. They tranquilly seat themselves in our back yards, day after day, and sketch our tumbledown and delapidated buildings, and mildly expostulate when we make tidy and prim the waste places of our domain, or modernize our quaint oldtime belongings. Without quibble or question, by the divine right of discovery, they preempt; their claims, wherever nature spreads her fairest scenes, "her spots of sunny openings, her greenest coronals of leaves, and brightest splendors of the grass."

•Squam, with its many attractions, its forests dense and dark with its great pines rustling and bending and whispering unutterable secrets to the hearing ear, the open sea, which has a never-failing charm, changing its phases every day and hour, the beautiful river, the seamed and scarred rocks and ledges, is a quaint and beautiful village.



